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ABSTRACT

After presenting a rationale for educational programs within correctional institutions, this paper describes the comprehensive educational program offered since 1965 by Lee College, Texas, to eligible inmates within units of the Texas Department of Corrections (TDC). The paper first discusses the importance of education to felon rehabilitation in light of the benefits of an organized educational program and the strong correlation between educational deficiencies and recidivous criminal behavior. A description is then presented of the TDC program's curriculum which, while providing comprehensive occupational instruction, maintains an equal emphasis on humanities and social science courses designed to help inmates face ethical, social, and political issues. Following discussions of attendance policies, class scheduling, and class size, the paper details criteria for inmate eligibility and notes the lower rate of rule violations among inmate/students. The paper then outlines the support services available to students and evaluates the program in terms of: (1) enrollment and graduation statistics; (2) the low rate of recividism among students who were subsequently paroled; and (3) the favorable attitudes of inmates toward the program. The paper concludes with a discussion of program financial support as derived from tuition, state aid, and the loan of facilities by the TDC. (JP)

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PREPARATION FOR LIFE AFTER INCARCERATION

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PREPARATION FOR LIFE AFTER INCARCERATION

It was not a heralded beginning, that fall in 1965, when Lee College of Baytown, Texas began offering college level courses in units of the Texas Department of Corrections. Realistically, no plaudits were then deserved as there were already several colleges across the country teaching courses inside prison walls. But those initial five academic sections, with 176 student-incarcerates enrolled, would become the touchstone on which has been erected the finest correctional education program in America, a program nurtured by the belief that incarceration for the purpose of rehabilitation must include, among other things, a well organized, well developed program of education and job skills training if an inmate upon release is to function in the free-world labor market as a self-respecting, worthwhile individual. Of course, such commitments are not uncommon; it is implementing them which constitutes the difficulty for those agencies which must cooperate in the development of a structured education program.

Fortunately, there were a number of positive factors working to ensure the success of a cooperative corrections-college educational undertaking. One such constituent was the dedicated leadership of the Texas Department of Corrections. Another ingredient was an innovative college, willing to devote energies, resources, and personnel to a project viewed not only as being fiscally sound, but also as being a human necessity.

Obviously one did not have to be revulsed by a Papillonian prison environment to recognize the need for reform in inmate rehabilitation. But why initiate costly educational programs in a milieu designed for punishing those who have a debt to society? Moreover, do correctional authorities actually agree

that education is an important component in the rehabilitation of felons? What benefits might accrue to society and to an inmate population exposed to an organized education program? And would a comprehensive educational program conduce to a lowered rate of recidivism? If there are justifiable affirmatives to the foregoing questions, what might the components of such an educational program be?

Briefly, the realization had developed that severe punishment and isolation as forms of "treatment" for offenders were not the solutions society accepted, so gradually the emphasis in corrections focused on the application of modern social, medical, psychological, psychiatric, and educational measures in rehabilitation and reformation. Interestingly, the introduction of industrial educational training in U.S. corrections occurred during the 19th century in the state of New York at the Elmira Reformatory, and came about as as result of the Yates law, which abolished prison labor as a form of generating fiscal support for the institution. Needing something to "occupy" the residents, basic instruction in the trades was initiated. While the Elmira project demonstrated some success in training for outside occupations, vocational training within the larger prison setting was generally fragmented, and academic instructional programs were all but non-existant throughout much of the first half of this century.

As penalogists' attitudes changed regarding rehabilitation, and an attendant interest in prison education programs surfaced, researchers began to study the nature of the inmate population for the purpose of discerning what rehabilitative services were needed within the prison setting. Myriad studies have disclosed that the great majority of offenders are socially disadvantaged, that they are

either uneducated or undereducated, and that they lack vocational skills and competencies. Not surprisingly, other studies report that the educational deficiencies of offenders constitute the single major cause of their criminal behavior, especially when such deficiencies are accompanied by unacceptable cultural, religious, and moral attitudes. With such facts at hand, corrections personnel became convinced of the necessity of including educational programs in the prison setting, particularly if offenders were to be returned to society with the hope that incarceration had served a useful purpose.

What is society's gain, then, in a prison educational undertaking? The most obvious and most immediate benefit derived by society through prison education programs is that once a prisoner's educational level and/or technical skills have improved, the probability of his return to criminal activity after leaving prison are greatly lessened. Thus, a more socially acceptable behavior is manifested on the part of the parolee as opposed to a return to his previous criminal behavior. As one writer put it in 1973, "correctional education should strive to impart to the inmate the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for attaining its primary objectives---successful adjustment to society.' From the vantage point of the taxpayer, it certainly is less costly to educate and train an individual with the expectation that he will become productive once returned to society as opposed to keeping him as an unwanted guest of the state.

To the question of whether or not a prison education program can be of value in reducing recidivism, an unqualified yes can be given, as generally applied to correctional education programs around the country and particularly as related to the Lee College-TDC program.

Realizing that there were affirmative responses to those four basic questions, here are some questions we might answer about the Lee College-TDC program. (1) What are some instructional components of the Lee College-TDC program? (2) Is the program a success in terms of the number of inmate students served? (3) How are inmate students selected for particiaption in the College-TDC program? (4) What services are included in the Lee College-TDC program? (5) Are there program graduates, which is traditionally a measure of institutional success? (6) And, are there indications that a reduced recidivism has occurred among those who have taken courses or programs through Lee College?

The Lee College-TDC post secondary program was initiated, after considerable planning, during the fall semester of 1965. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, there were initially five academic courses offered that first semester, all of which were conducted in the Huntsville prison complex at three contiguous units. Subsequently, the college has conducted programs of instruction in eight of the Departments 14 Correctional Units, including the women's unit at Goree. From the five courses generated that first semester in 1965, the program grew beyond all expectations, to a point that an average semester will include more than 200 sections on the units, with virtual pariety between academic and technical-vocational offerings. Technical-vocational courses, incidentally, were not long in coming into the Lee College-TDC post-secondary program, making their first appearance during the Spring semester of 1966. But the initial emphasis on academic courses in the humanities and social sciences continues in all programs based upon the rationale that such courses give prisoners a new insight into who they are and what they may become. The assumption underlying this emphasis is that prisoners who are later confronted

with ethical, social and or political issues will be better equipped to tolerate alternative views, issues and politics. With respect to the skills training provided by the college, a comprehensive occupational program is available to all qualified inmates. Technical-vocational programs included in the current College-TDC curriculum are Auto Body Repair, Auto Mechanics, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Technology, Ornamental Horticulture, Radio-Television Repair, Upholstery, Welding, Industrial Electricity, Carpentry, Truck Driving, and Diesel Mechanics.

As one might expect, class attendance is mandatory in the prison program, consequently inmates have a high rate of attendance. Additionally, inmate students are relieved from work assignments to attend day classes. However, permission to attend a given class may be denied by a unit warden. Classes of three semester credits meet once a week for three hours, while those earning four credits meet twice a week for three hours at a time. Many technical-vocational classes meet seven hours daily, five days a week.

The initial classes averaged 35 students per section, clearly an acceptable size from a managerial prospective. Today's class size averages are 25 in academic areas and 18 in technical-vocational courses. The headcount enrollment at TDC during a typical semester will be in the 2000-2400 range. So for both the College and TDC, the program has been successful in terms of the numbers served and the behavioral changes manifested by those who have been enrolled in the program. In summary, the College offers essentially the same degree and certificate options inside the walls as those offered on campus, and the enrollments justify the comprehensive nature of the program.

To be eligible for participation in the college program, an inmate must be in good standing in his residential unit and he must have earned at least 75 points in the Point Incentive Program (PIP). PIP points are earned for one's participation in recreational, cultural, religious, and educational pursuits coupled with positive job performance evaluations by supervisors. If these criteria are satisfactory, an inmate must then meet the general admission requirements of the college, exactly as his counterparts on campus. Such requirements include graduation from an accredited high school or satisfactory completion of the five-section GED, or by special permission if neither of the above criteria are met. Vocational courses are usually the only courses inmates may take under the latter circumstance.

While participating in the college program, inmates are usually less inclined toward violations requiring disciplinary action, and the same holds true for the immediate period preceding initial enrollment. Significantly, an aspect of the instructional program which TDC finds especially pleasing is this comparatively low disciplinary situation for those who are enrolled, especially as compared with the period preceding their acceptance for participation in the program. To illustrate this point, consider the following. One hundred forty seven technical-vocational inmate students were evaluated for commission of rule infraction for a three month period prior to their participation in the college program and a similar ninety day period following admission to the program, with the evidence of rule infractions having been verified by TDC records. During this latter three month period these 147 trainees were involved in a total of only 13 infractions necessitating disciplinary action.

However, in the months immediately prior to achieving eligiblity for participation in the college program, 115 of these men were cited for violations. While this may not constitute evidence of any significant attitude changes in the inmates, it does suggest the development of more positive impulse control and concomitant behavioral changes when there are personal goals to be accomplished. One final comment on this topic is that individuals who have been involved in the college program are more successful in achieving parole than non-participants.

To be sure, no instructional program is complete without certain attendant service functions. With respect to the student services available to the incarcerated clientele, counseling, guidance and academic advisement functions are available on a full-time basis, in addition to job placement activities, when appropriate. Financial aids and veterans counseling are available on a weekly basis when campus based staff visit each unit. The case load during such visits is extremely heavy, but most productive and highly appreciated. There is also access to an adequate library, which is supported principally by the Windham School District and supplemented by Lee College acquisitions and gifts.

As those who have undergone regional accreditation know, a measure of an institution's effectiveness is the number of graduates it produces. On January 26, 1970, Lee College conferred its first Associate degrees behind the walls, with the college faculty in full academic regalia participating in the ceremony. There were two degree recipients at that ceremony, both of whom had completed high school equivalency and all college requirements while incarcerated. Incidentially, both graduates had grade point averages near or above the

Similarly the affect of post confinement education on recidivism was often reported as insignificant, although more recent studies relating to the subject report a "likelihood" of reduced recidivism.

For clarification of terms, a recidivist is defined as a person who has been returned to prison for commission of a felony, after having been released on parole.

Since the inception of the Lee College-TDC association, the central hope has been to return men to society in such a condition that they could assume positions of freedom in the general community. There has been more than a degree of success in this undertaking. One of the first studies completed by the Texas Department of Corrections on recidivism and educational participation indicated that only five percent of those who had done college work in the Lee College-TDC program were returned to confinement for felonious activity, within the temporal period of that study.

In a later study conducted in 1973, in which all subjects were either participants or former technical-vocational program participants, 16 percent recidivated (1002 individuals/9+ hours completed). Likewise, a study in 1976 involving 4,444 parolees who had participated in the TDC college pre-baccalaureate program during the period August 1965 through December, 1974, revealed a recidivism rate of 13.97. According to TDC and college statistics on all Associate degree recipients for the years 1976 and 1977, of which there were 151, only 12 of those 78 released on parole have been recommitted to TDC for felony commissions (15%). The rate of recidivism for all other TDC inmates for the same period was 35 percent. Figures are not yet available for the last three years, but similar results are expected.

honors level. These were thought to be the first two prisoners in the United States to complete all degree requirements for graduation while imprisoned. Since the inception of the college program, 13,329 incarcerates have enrolled in one or more courses through Lee College and 649 of these men and women have taken Associate degrees. Countless others have completed certificate training. One must keep in mind that these incarcerates are pursuing educational courses on a part-time basis, and not always in consecutive semesters. On the average, inmates pursuing a course of study with Lee College will enroll for 7.75 semester hours. As one might imagine, a 64 semester hour goal could seem insurmountable under such conditions of confinement, but 649 have thus far been successful in achieving that goal. We expect in excess of 200 associate degree graduates this spring. Someone once remarked that "the gent who wakes up and finds himself a success hasn't been asleep, he's been fulfilling a dream." According to the testimonies of many of these prisoners, they have experienced more success in completing graduation requirements than they had in all other life activities. Their sleep apparently was not filled only with the nightmares of incarceration, but with dreams of success.

Notwithstanding that participation in or graduation from the Lee College-TDC program is desirable from several points of view, the bottom line is the extent to which the rate of recidivism is lowered for participants as compared with non-participants, if such is the case. Much of the literature, especially that prior to 1970, suggested that about two-thirds of those released on parole were later recommitted to confinement for felonious activity. But these data were primarily related to Federal violations and violators.

Inmates themselves have reported numerous positive concomitants to reduced disciplinary problems and lowered recidivism. In another survey conducted by the Texas Education Agency at the Texas Department of Corrections in 1972, 100 inmates enrolled in both academic and technical-vocational training completed a questionnaire which dealt with values and attitudes. The results were overwhelmingly positive. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents reported that it was both an honor and priviledge to be selected for participation in the program. Eighty-nine percent said the effort and time spent in the program were worthwhile and the result would be of benefit throughout life, while 75 percent stated that the program provided a special interest and challenge to them which had not been available to them on the outside. The availability of programs teaching new skills was very much appreciated and, according to those participating in the study, the opportunity to learn was as important to them as the skills acquired.

One revealing disclosure concerned inmate perceptions of their newly developed self-reliance. Eighty percent reported that they felt they had developed sufficient self reliance and personal initiative to succeed in the outside world. Significantly, 35% felt that graduation from the program, in the presence of their families and friends, had been the most positive moment in their lives.

One final though very obvious question, at this stage, is how is this program financed? There are several ramifications to the question which require individual responses. First, the TDC will assist qualified inmates with tuition for one course each semester, with the inmate bearing the tuitional costs for all other courses taken during any enrollment period. Previously,

the TDC would finance up to 12 semester hours per enrollment period, but the shrinking value of the dollar and the expanding prison population has lately rendered this impossible. As for the contact/credit hours generated by the inmate students, the college receives from the State the prevailing apportionment formula rate for the various courses. For example, an automotive course will generate $3.00/ contact hour, a welding course will produce $2.99/contact hour, and a data processing course about $4.50. While general academic courses range from a low of $2.77/hour for psychology to $3.69 for a communications course.

A second consideration concerns the facilities which house the prison instructional programs and the laboratory and shop equipment used in those facilities. The TDC provides, at no cost to the college, the educational facilities in which all college level instruction is conducted. Consequently, neither local taxes nor other sources of institutional income are devoted to facilities construction, operation and/or maintenance. Capital equipment used in the prison instructional programs, however, is currently financed jointly by the college and TDC's Windham School District, though originally even the laboratories were equipped by TDC through Windham School District funding procedures. Therefore, the major expenses for the Lee College-TDC instructional program are payroll and capital equipment.

Certainly the cost associated with the Lee College-TDC instructional program is not prohibitive in consideration of the services rendered. The major service being to make incarceration and the attendant rehabilitation society's gain in returning to the outside world skilled motivated, self-respecting perso[illegible]